

The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Hasmonean State

Hanan Eshel

Preface, Introduction, and Chapter One

ISBN- 978-0-8028-6285-3

Reviewed by Jim West

“The present book is an effort to integrate the disciplines of archaeology, history, and Qumran studies, demonstrating how the Qumran scrolls can contribute to our understanding of the Hasmonean Period” (p. viii) writes Eshel in the Preface. And then in the Introduction he notes “The basic argument of this study is that the pseudonyms in the pesharim and in the Damascus Document refer to historical figures of the same period. I will attempt to identify these figures through a reconstruction of the political history of Judaea during the Hasmonean period” (p. 4). And so he does, launching straightaway into a description of *The Roots of the Hasmonean Revolt: The Reign of Antiochus IV*.

In the opening chapter Eshel argues, in my opinion quite persuasively, that the writings of Josephus can be, and should be, supplemented by the materials found in the Dead Sea Scrolls when we attempt to reconstruct the period of the Hasmoneans. To do this, Eshel shows, through a meticulously close reading of various of the scrolls, the historical materials which are embedded in them.

So, taking 4Q248 in hand, Eshel examines it, line by line, and describes the historical situation underlying each of them. “The Greek king whose activities are described in 4Q248 is Antiochus IV” (p. 14). Eshel suggests, further, concerning this fragment, that “... this fragment was composed shortly before the Book of Daniel was completed in its final form” (p. 18).

He also looks at the opening section of the War Scroll and opines “As will be shown in the coming chapters, the Qumranites had no sympathy for the Hasmonean rulers, who had usurped the high priesthood as early as in the days of Mattathias' son Jonathan. Perhaps this was why they ignored Mattathias and Judah Maccabee” (p. 21).

Next, 4Q390 is examined and, for Eshel, this text “... reflects disapproval of the functioning of the priests throughout the Second Temple period” (p. 22). Again, a thoroughgoing analysis of each line offers Eshel the opportunity to glean quite specific historical information which matches nicely what we know from other sources concerning the Hasmoneans and supplements that information quite well.

There is a problem, I imagine of a typographical nature, at the bottom of page 22 and the top of page 23. Amidst his discussion of 4Q390 he writes “The scroll 4Q390 from Qumran seems to be a further 'update' of 4Q390...” Evidently the line should read “The scroll 4Q390 from Qumran seems to be a further 'update' of Daniel 9...” I take this to be the case since on pages 26-27 he writes “... it seems probable that 4Q390 is an interpretation of Daniel 9, intended to 'update' the prophecy of 490 years”.

“To summarize: the two scrolls from Cave 4 provide significant supplementary information about events in Jerusalem prior to the outbreak of the Hasmonean Revolt in Modi'in” (p. 27).

And perhaps he's right. Still, there's always, lingering, in the back of one's mind as one

reads the very clear and careful historical exegesis of each line of Qumran text which Eshel offers, the nagging question- “how can we be sure that the history **seen** underlying the text is the actual history **lying behind** the text?” To be sure, Professor Eshel is probably right. But there is room for doubt.

As more evidence is mustered doubt may vanish. We shall see.